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ABSTRACT

This theme issue includes four articles on high performance by poor Texas schools. In "Principal of National Blue Ribbon School Says High Poverty Schools Can Excel" (interview with Robert Zarate by Christie L. Goodman), the principal of Mary Hull Elementary School (San Antonio, Texas) describes how the high-poverty, high-minority school dramatically improved its scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Strategies included moving from a remedial model to a challenging curriculum, implementing a technology lab and a balanced reading program, creating high expectations for students, adding excitement to the school environment, including teachers in collaborative decision making, involving parents and families, aligning the curriculum, and being proactive. "High Poverty, High Performing: High Hope!" (Hilaria Bauer) discusses the ingredients of high schoolwide performance: quality in the overall school experience, caring competent teachers, high expectations, and wise use of resources to fulfill the school's mission of excellence. "Low Income Does Not Cause Low School Achievement: Creating a Sense of Family and Respect in the School Environment" (Anita Tijerina Revilla, Yvette De La Garza Sweeney) summarizes results of three studies identifying major factors that promote high performing schools: creating a familial environment, educating the "whole" child, celebrating cultural and linguistic diversity, assuming responsibility for teaching, and involving parents. "Whatever It Takes!" (Joseph F. Johnson, Jr.) reflects on the success of low-income Texas schools in meeting state standards for TAAS scores. Sidebars outline critical elements of high performing schools and list 17 educational sites on the World Wide Web. (SV)

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INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

IDRA Newsletter

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IDRA Focus:
High Poverty, High Performing Schools

ED 410 083

Principal of National Blue Ribbon School Says High Poverty Schools Can Excel

Inside this Issue:

◇ Creating high performing schools
◇ Whatever it takes
◇ Quality and high hope
◇ Education web sites

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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Editor's note: Mary Hull Elementary School in San Antonio is one of 262 schools nationwide that has been named a National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. The high poverty, high minority school has seen dramatic improvements over the last four years. In 1993, the Texas Education Agency warned the school that if significant improvements were not made, the school would be closed. Led by principal Roberto Zarate, M.A., staff members were already collaborating to reform the school even before the warning. As a result, students at Mary Hull last year increased their TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) passing rates to 74 percent in math and 75 percent in reading. In an interview by IDRA staff member, Christie L. Goodman, APR (C.G.), Mr. Zarate (R.Z.) describes how the school improved so dramatically. The following is the text of that conversation, which took place just before the national awards were announced.

C.G.: Why don't we start off with you describing the school and the students here?

R.Z.: There are 522 students at Mary Hull this year, with grade levels from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Our school is approximately 92 percent minority, predominately Hispanic. About 88 percent of the kids are on free and reduced lunches.

We have been working on many goals, and a major one is parental involvement. We are very proud of our parental involvement program. Extremely high participation numbers have shown us that our parents care and have a lot of pride in the school.

Mary Hull is very technologically oriented. We have at least three computers in every classroom, and are about to be networked.

We are in a process of **redefining the school overall**. When I first became principal here, this school was basically a remedial school. It was very low-achieving. Students were not attaining the type of success that they, their parents and their teachers wanted. Everything was based on a remedial model. Soon after I started, we accelerated the curriculum in order to challenge the students. Staff members and teachers decided to reject the status quo instead of perpetuating it. We created new methods to replace the old ways of learning.

For example, one of the traditional methods of instruction through Title I is to hire reading specialists to tutor the students. Instead, we developed and **implemented a technology lab,** where students are able to utilize higher thinking skills and work interactively in a sort of logic problem-solving environment. For instance in math, instead of requiring students to practice routine math operations over and over, we challenge the student's ability to think by requiring him or her to use different processes to reach solutions. In doing this, the student's level of intelligence and ability to interact with everyday math increases. So far, this method has proven to be very successful.

In reading also, instead of constantly hammering away at isolated skills, we decided to implement a **balanced reading program.** Teachers use a lot of stories and fairy tales in elementary school, and that is wonderful because children need that. But children also need the expository instruction

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The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity. The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, copyright ©1997) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

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CHILDREN FIRST DECLARATION

The faculty of the department of curriculum and instruction at McMurry University has endorsed the Children First declaration issued by IDRA in March of 1995. The declaration initially gave civic organizations, business, community groups, school personnel and the general public the opportunity to voice their commitment to children in light of the Texas Supreme Court's January 1995 ruling on the *Edgewood vs. Meno* school funding case. With the support of more than 70 individuals and organizations, the declaration continues to outline our commitment to the creation of a truly equitable funding system.

After voting to endorse the declaration, the McMurry University School of Education dean, Terry Northup, Ph.D. wrote: "We believe strongly that every child has the right to a high quality education, not merely a minimal education. The future of Texas depends on educational opportunity for all that will allow students to rise as high as their aspiration and motivation will carry them."

For a copy of IDRA's Children First declaration and list of endorsers, contact IDRA at 210/684-8180 or view it on the IDRA Internet web site at www.idra.org.

Blue Ribbon School *- continued from page 1*

that teaches them to read for information, to retrieve information, and so on. We also incorporated phonics into our reading programs. We found that many of the problems resulted from the children having a lack of decoding skills, not having the proper skills to attack words, sound them out and so on. With the added attention to phonics, we have a nice balance now. Our bilingual program works in a similar manner. A substantial part of the bilingual program deals with literature of all genres, and it has incorporated a strong phonetics program. Basically, Mary Hull re-tooled everything and raised its expectations. The result has been all the awards we have received this year.

C.G.: What are those awards?

R.Z.: First we were designated as a "recognized" school in the state of Texas. With the accountability system that Texas has through TAAS [Texas Assessment of Academic Skills] testing, there are four levels a school can reach. The two highest are "recognized" and "exemplary." If all of your students – including all of your subgroups like Hispanics, Blacks and economically disadvantaged students – score above the 70th percentile on the test, your school is considered a "recognized" school. Mary Hull achieved this last year, which was a big departure from where we were about five years ago. Then we were at about 19 percent mastery in math and 30 percent mastery in reading. So we have gained 40 or 50 points from where we were before. Last year our whole school was at 74 percent mastery both in reading and math. I realize that 74 percent mastery does not sound real exciting to schools that are scoring in the 90s and 80s, but for us this increase marks a huge improvement achieved in little time and with a lot of determination.

Then we were designated as a Title I commended school, which means that the service delivery to Title I children is exceptional. The Texas Education Agency awarded us this distinction based on our TAAS scores.

Not long after that we got involved with the Blue Ribbon campaign. Every school that has any kind of achievement to document is encouraged to send in an application to the Texas Education Agency [TEA]. Our district suggested that we submit an application, along with six other schools in the Northside school district. TEA selected 28 elementary schools throughout the state, and we were one of them. We were the only one selected in San Antonio and South Texas. After receiving that award at the state level, TEA sent the application to the U.S. Department of Education to be judged along with a pool of over 500 national applicants. From this pool, a national panel selected about 300 schools for visitations. The national panel visited our school in April, and now we are expecting notification any minute. If we are selected, we will be recognized as a national school of excellence in the Blue Ribbon program, and we will travel to Washington to receive our award from President Clinton. It is real exciting.

C.G.: How do you create high expectations for your students?

R.Z.: That is a very difficult question. I think what you need to do is **stop judging and making excuses.** For instance, if you have a group of students who are from a low-income environment and have all the

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High Poverty, High Performing: High Hope!

Hilaria Bauer, M.A.

Traditionally, poor students have been deprived of academically challenging opportunities. One writer summarized this phenomenon as follows: "We take students who have less to begin with and give them less in school too" (Olson, 1997).

Consequently, many high poverty schools are also low performing. However, high poverty, high performing schools have demonstrated that, "*Sí se puede*" [It can be done]. Mary Hull Elementary is a good example (see interview on Page 1).

In addition to believing that all students can learn, high poverty, high performing schools are based on the belief that all students can *excel* (Lindsay, 1997). The ingredient most cited as being the foundation to high performance is *quality*. High performing schools provide students with more academically oriented curricula and more challenging tasks (Stringfield, 1994).

Thus, there is hope when there is quality. *Quality* refers to the overall school experience. It covers everything from teaching strategies, to expectations, to resources. *Teaching quality* is perhaps the most important strategy for achieving the nation's education goals (Edwards, 1997). Although measuring teaching quality is difficult, one way we can look at this issue is in terms of the kind of teacher we would want for our own kids. "A caring, competent and qualified teacher for every child is the most important ingredient in education reform," argues the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (Olson, 1997).

Another important ingredient is *school expectations*. High performing schools expect their students to succeed – all of their students. Too many teachers, administrators and school board members think the problem lies within the children, not the school. They refuse to believe that fundamental change is needed, and they are unwilling, or feel unable, to change the school system. The message seems to be, "We'll do a better job if you send us better children" (Olson, 1997).

In high performing schools, students are given challenging curricula and demanding tasks, and they are expected to succeed. High performing schools regard every child as an asset. Moreover, each child is considered to possess a unique gift to offer to society.

Schools that provide high quality education invest their *resources* in the fulfillment of their vision. That vision is one of students excelling. I have yet to meet a principal of a high performing school who is not aware of the material and financial needs and resources of his or her campus. Although there is no clear evidence to support a correlation between the amount of money invested in a school and its performance, one thing appears certain in the literature: the way money is invested in schools matters, and it matters a lot.

Despite much controversy, the fact is that the quality of children's education today depends largely on where they live. High poverty, high performing schools seek ways to increase their resources. And once they find the resources, they invest them wisely.

High poverty, high performing schools are organized and operated in the manner most conducive to learning. Every individual in the school understands and supports the school's mission. That is, each person works with others to attain high performance levels. From students, to parents, to administrators, to the community in general, everyone is working toward the same effort, and their common denominator is *quality*.

Promoting Equity Through Standards

"The hope of the "standards movement" is that standards can be a tool for realizing equal opportunity in education... In schools where 'discrimination by expectation' is the norm – where White students benefit from the expectation that their futures involve classroom success leading to post-secondary education while African American and Latino students lose through the silent judgment of their teachers that they are not 'college material' – academic standards can establish a commitment to high expectations for all students."

"The question is simple: Will standards be used to promote equity and opportunity in our schools, or will they become new means of sorting and labeling the most vulnerable students away from the educational mainstream and meaningful learning and from the chances for life success that they offer?"

"As a nation... we must accept the responsibility of replacing a pedagogy of poverty with a pedagogy of challenge... We need to make schools places where every child matters. When we meet these challenges, we can expect students to meet standards.

– Jo-Anne Wilson Keenan and Anne Wheelock, "The Standards Movement in Education: Will Poor and Minority Students Benefit?" *Poverty & Race* (Washington, D.C.: Poverty and Race Research Action Council, May-June 1997).

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Low Income Does Not Cause Low School Achievement: Creating a Sense of Family and Respect in the School Environment

Anita Tijerina Revilla, M.A., and Yvette De La Garza Sweeney

Current research on the performance of low-income schools has not only served to dispel the myth that low income equals low academic achievement, it has also proven that when the certain schoolwide strategies are implemented *all* schools and *all* children can be high performing. In this article, the results of three major studies are summarized and combined into a table on Page 5 that highlights the five major factors that created success at these campuses. The results of the studies can provide ideas for school administrators and staff, particularly in schools that are in the process of developing school improvement plans and for low-income schools with low academic achievement.

Students in low-income schools often deal with obstacles in the school environment that stem from cultural and power dynamics. Antonia Darder, author of *Culture and Power*, states:

> [Bicultural students] must contend with (1) two cultural systems whose values are very often in direct conflict and (2) a set of sociopolitical and historical forces dissimilar to those of mainstream...students and the educational institutions that bicultural students must attend (Darder, 1991).

For example, most methods of academic assessment of students in U.S. classrooms are rooted in a middle-class model based on middle-class values. Thus, students who have learning styles, communication skills or home environments that are dissimilar to this middle-class model are believed to be disadvantaged or at-risk primarily because they are different. Darder advocates *cultural democracy* in the classroom, a concept she defines as follows:

> The right of individuals to be educated in their own language and learning style and the right to maintain a bicultural identity – that is, to retain an identification with their culture of origin while integrating, in a constructive manner, the institutional values of the dominant culture (Darder, 1991).

The same should be true for the parents of these students. If schools and teachers expect parents to be involved in the schooling process, they must respect and encourage the parents to maintain their own cultural values and practices and to utilize them as they come into contact with the school environment. Otherwise, students often begin to reject the authority and knowledge of their parents, resulting in lessened parental involvement and the devaluation of the home as a learning environment.

For example, in 1982 Richard Rodriguez wrote of his embarrassment as a "scholarship boy." He wrote:

> 'Your parents must be so proud of you.' People began to say that to me by about the time I was in sixth grade...Shyly, I'd smile, never betraying my sense of the irony: I was not proud of my mother and father. I was embarrassed by their lack of education. It was not that I ever thought that they were stupid, though stupidly I took for granted their enormous native intelligence. Simply what mattered to me was that they were not like my teachers (Rodriguez, 1982).

Rodriguez and others have experienced great shame because of the fact that schools often do not value each child's home language and culture. It is up to the educator, the parent and society to assure children that their bicultural knowledge and existence is regarded positively, not shamefully. Therefore, parental involvement and schoolwide inclusivity depends on mutual respect on the part of the student, the parents and the school personnel.

A study by the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, *Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs*, identifies several factors that account for successful schoolwide programs for low-income students (Charles A. Dana Center, 1997). One of the key indicators of success found was the "sense of family" created in the school environment. The researchers reported:

> Beyond the inclusivity evidenced by the schools,...[they] observed a powerful sense of family. Not only were students, parents and all school personnel included as a part of the team, they were also included as part of the school family (Charles A. Dana Center, 1997).

According to the Dana Center study, it was exactly that type of mutual respect that aided the success of several low-income schools in Texas. The most common traits of the high performing, low-income schools are related to creating a sense of family.

The schools examined in the Dana Center study achieved state recognition for high performance while having a high percentage of low-income students. These schools, by example, showed that low income does not equate with low performance. On the contrary, students at these schools, who were highly valued and respected in the classroom regardless of their economic background or academic preparation, proved to be high achievers.

Project Pathways was a statewide collaborative formulated in 1993 between the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA); the Center for Success and Learning (CSL); the Texas Association for Supervision, Curriculum and Development (TASCD); and Educational Services Centers I, IV, X and XX, funded by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), designed to address the needs of the students at the secondary level who do not pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test (Adame-Reyna, 1993).

IDRA created seven Project Pathways training sessions emphasizing strategies that better prepare minority students to be successful on the TAAS test.

To inform the development of the Project Pathways program, IDRA set out to identify the characteristics and needs of students and schools with poor TAAS performance by studying diverse school districts (rural and urban, small and large, high and low minority student enrollment, high and low performance on the TAAS) from four regional education areas.

IDRA published the study, entitled *Project Pathways: Programs That Work*, that found that state-recognized high performing campuses share several characteristics that have resulted in improved TAAS test achievement (IDRA, 1993). The critical elements outlined in the study include the following:

- solid and supportive administrative leadership;
- positive expectations of students;
- strong, integrated curriculum;

Creating a Sense of Family - continued on page 8

Creating High Performing Schools

Factor	Examples Cited by Research and Experience
Create and nurture a familial environment	• Students were given respect. • Counselors, nurses, social workers and family liaisons worked together to ensure that students' basic needs were met. • The sense of family was all inclusive among students, parents and school staff. Each staff member was highly valued as an individual. • Everyone who came in contact with students participated in ensuring their success. • Everyone on the campus was involved in the students' learning process. • The school was considered to be a family more than just a system for learning. • School staff ensured that students knew they were held in high esteem.
Educate the "whole" child	• Each teacher's priority was the student's total development, not only performance on standardized tests. • Emphasis was placed on ensuring positive academic achievement for *every* child. • Failure was not tolerated, expectations were not lowered. • Emphasis was placed on positive achievement rather than negative. • Teachers avoided stigmatizing students and categorizing or labeling them. • *All* accomplishments were praised and recognized. • Students were allowed to become actively involved in decisions relating to their school experiences. • Strategies such as cooperative learning and peer-to-peer tutoring allowed students to take possession of their learning.
Celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity	• Cultural and linguistic diversity was integrated into school activities and curriculum. • Teachers and staff provided a school environment similar to that of the local community. • The home culture of minority families was respected and valued. • Students were encouraged to use their native language in order to communicate effectively. • Teachers utilized students' native language to help them develop proficiency in the new language.
Assume responsibility for teaching	• Teachers created their own assessment tools to determine which methods would contribute positively to higher academic achievement. • Academic success for *every* child was the highest priority when teachers developed lessons. • Curriculum was aligned with standardized test objectives. • Teachers experimented with creative activities in an effort to improve student success while maintaining high expectations. • Teachers practiced team teaching. • Once particular goals were achieved, higher goals were defined. • A stable environment was provided through continuum of classes. • Limited-English-proficient (LEP) students were not segregated from native English-speaking students. • Students practiced literacy development activities. • Schools created a program that assists LEP students with language acquisition. • Schools had a strong, integrated curriculum. • Administrative leadership was strong. • Campuses practiced shared decision making. • Schools advocated high morale and schoolwide support for students' academic achievement. • Schools provided master teacher tutoring and reading, writing and math labs.
Communicate and involve parents	• Parents were highly valued members of the school environment, and they knew they were an important part of the school family. • It was important to school staff that parents were able to communicate their views and concerns. Educational jargon was avoided and parents were not spoken to in condescending ways. • Teachers avoided forcing parents into traditional parenting roles. • Outreach to parents was extensive, ensuring high parent participation. • Schools maintained open door policies and created a welcoming environment, especially for parents. • The cultural and linguistic diversity of office staff enabled LEP parents to feel more comfortable and a part of the team.

Developed by IDRA from research conducted by IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center, at the University of Texas at Austin, and Beverly McLeod.

REFLECTIONS

Joseph F. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D.

WHATEVER IT TAKES!

I will never forget our principal, Bernadine Hawthorne, as she addressed her new school faculty for the first time. With confidence and a gentle, but powerful determination, she explained: "Whatever you know about this school from previous years, whatever you've read in the papers about schools in this part of the city, whatever you saw when you drove into the neighborhood, I want you to know that these students can and will succeed academically. You will teach them and I will be here to help and support you as you make it happen. We'll just do whatever it takes."

Three years later, after much hard work, self-analysis, experimentation and refinement, our school had gone from being one of the lowest achieving schools in the city of San Diego, California, to being one of the highest. We proved to ourselves that issues of poverty and ethnicity did not limit our ability to teach, or our students' ability to learn.

It has been my privilege to observe many schools in Texas achieve even greater levels of academic success. When the Texas Education Agency put forth the goal of 90 percent of all students passing each section of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, many assumed that this was an impossible dream for schools challenged by poverty. Yet, in the 1995-1996 school year, 428 Texas schools with 50 percent or more of their students meeting free- or reduced-price lunch criteria received "recognized" ratings, and another 54 such schools received "exemplary" ratings. Thus, the dream of having almost all students passing the TAAS test was actualized.

I have had the pleasure of visiting and studying several of these schools. My career as an educator has been powerfully affected and my faith in public education restored. My belief in the potential of parents, teachers, principals and support staff to work together to transform lives has been renewed and deepened as a result of my interactions with these schools.

When leaving Scott Elementary in Houston, you walk away believing that any goal can be achieved. When you visit Milam Elementary in Grand Prairie, you cannot help but be affected by their powerful passion for excellence. When you visit Dovalina Elementary in Laredo and walk around the surrounding area, you inevitably will tell yourself, "If they can accomplish this here, it can be accomplished anywhere!"

The less informed might assume that these schools have become "TAAS mills" – places where students and teachers have resigned themselves to focus on arduous rituals of drill and practice on TAAS-related issues. In general, these successful schools are not TAAS mills. In fact, studies by the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin conducted through the STAR Center (the comprehensive regional assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas, a collaborative of IDRA, the Dana Center at UT Austin and RMC Research Corporation) indicate otherwise. The findings suggest that the great majority of these schools are places where creativity abounds, there is a rich and full curriculum, and students and teachers enjoy a challenging educational experience. Part of the reason these schools are successful seems to be that they recognize the centrality of human relationships in the educational process. They recognize that students are not learning machines to be programmed, rather they are individuals with a broad range of valuable interests, abilities, curiosities and needs. They recognize that parents should not be considered scapegoats or obstacles, instead they should be treated as respected partners who bring important perspectives and often the untapped potential to grow in their capacity to support their children's education. Similarly, at these schools, it is recognized that teachers, principals and support staff are not robots or drill machines. Instead, these schools are places where every educator is recognized as a valuable contributor with unique strengths and impressive potential to learn, grow and improve.

Again, the less informed might assume that these schools are satisfied with their accomplishment of state achievement goals. In spite of their high rates of poverty, many of these schools have achieved better results than some of the most affluent schools in their districts or regions. Yet, it does not take long to recognize that the passion for improvement goes far beyond state achievement goals and far beyond TAAS scores.

Any conversation with the principal or staff members from Pietsch Elementary in Beaumont will reveal that their focus far exceeds TAAS. They work to change the quality of life for children. A visit to the school library at Hueco Elementary in Socorro Independent School District (ISD) will reveal a mission that goes far beyond TAAS and focuses on developing strong literacy skills and interests among families. A visit to the HOSTS program (Help One Student To Succeed) at Marcell, Pearson, Waitz or Leal elementaries in Mission Consolidated ISD leads you to understand that their focus is not just on improving test scores, it is also on building a stronger community where adults and children recognize and value their ability to contribute to each other's lives. At these schools, educators have dedicated themselves to whatever course of action they believe is necessary to make an intensive and sustained impact on the lives of the children and families they serve.

I am a better educator today because of my experiences with these high-achieving schools. I have a deeper sense of responsibility regarding my work because I better understand the difference that schools can make. These schools have given me a great sense of optimism about the future of public education because they prove what can be done. At the same time, these schools have given me a greater sense of urgency, because their accomplishments demand that we ask difficult questions of ourselves: "If it can happen here, why not everywhere?"

Whatever It Takes! - continued on page 7

ECONOMICS
FOR TODAY'S LESSON, WE'LL BE USING THESE TEXTBOOKS FROM 1975, HANDED DOWN FROM THE WEALTHIER NEIGHBORING SUBURBAN SCHOOL.
KIRK

Reprinted with permission from the artist Kirk Anderson

Whatever It Takes! *- continued from page 6*

The number of successful schools is growing rapidly. I can envision a day when every child in a Texas public school – regardless of his or her income, race, ethnicity, language background or home situation – will attend a school that establishes an educational environment that enables that student to attain challenging levels of academic skills and secure the educational background that will allow that student to pursue a wide array of exciting opportunities upon graduation. It can happen. In some schools in Texas, it is already happening, with whatever it takes.

Dr. Joseph F. Johnson, Jr. is a site director for the STAR Center and is the director of school improvement initiatives at the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Comments and questions may be sent to him vie E-mail at jfjohnson@mail.utexas.edu.

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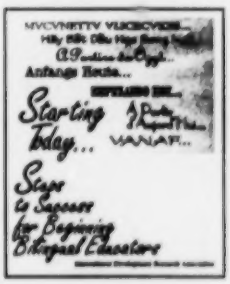

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Creating a Sense of Family - continued from page 4

- shared decision making; and
- campus-wide responsibility for teaching and success (see box at right).

Many of the schools that had high TAAS performance also had high percentages of minority and low-income students. Contrary to the widespread belief that these students could not achieve high test scores, the statistics showed that the high TAAS performance at these campuses included *all* students. This study once again documented that the value of a student must be held high if high achievement is desired because any child who is devalued in the classroom becomes a child "at-risk."

A study by Beverly McLeod funded by the U.S. Department of Education provides a basis for understanding various types of reforms that provide limited-English-proficient (LEP) students with "equal access to an academic program of high quality" (McLeod, 1996). The study focused on various areas of educational reform such as curriculum, parental and community involvement, and student diversity. Eight primary and secondary schools with high percentages of LEP students participated in the study. Each of the schools involved developed and implemented several methods for achieving positive academic outcomes in which every student received an equal opportunity for academic success.

The five major factors practiced by the high performing schools that contributed to the high achievement of low-income and/or linguistic and cultural minority students include the following:

- **Created and nurtured a familial environment** – A non-threatening school environment was created. The entire school staff was involved in assuring individual success while also maintaining a sense of family.
- **Educated the *whole* child** – Each individual child's academic success was important. No child could be left behind. Respect, support, encouragement and the child's total development were all priorities.
- **Celebrated cultural and linguistic diversity** – Sensitivity to diversity was demonstrated within the school population and community. Accommodations were made to ensure two-way communication among students, parents and school personnel.
- **Assumed responsibility for teaching** – Teachers, administrators and school districts exhibited active participation in students' success. Adopted techniques were continually assessed by a reflective practitioner. Students were given the opportunity to become actively involved in the learning process.
- **Communicated and involved parents** – Parents were valued and involved in the educational process. They were respected and appreciated, and they were actively encouraged to be a part of the school family.

In summary, there is a myth that has inappropriately been attached to low-income students; that is, low-income students cannot reach high academic standards. The three studies summarized in this article serve as concrete examples that dispel the myth. Low-income and minority students have demonstrated high performance in schools, yet there are several responsibilities that school administrators and staff must accept in order to ensure that success. The factors listed in this article are techniques that work. School families, highly valued students and parents, and strong, supportive administrations do create success.

Critical Elements of High Performing Campuses

Certain elements are critical to assuring that high poverty schools become high performing schools. Activities alone will not notably improve student performance. Activities intended as minimal or remedial responses start from weak premises, they assume that students "don't care," "can't learn," or "won't make the effort," and they quickly lose strength. In direct contrast, activities gain strength from the critical elements (listed below). This is because the elements themselves derive from sound educational precepts: the valuing of students, their education and teachers. The critical elements assume that *properly supported, students can learn and teachers can teach.*

Effective administrative leadership – The principal sets the pace of change and promotes standards, exemplifies and encourages a positive atmosphere and enthusiasm for learning, expects creative problem solving from teachers, shares decision making with faculty, encourages academic leadership, supports professional development, evaluates programs, gives innovative programs time to work, and seeks faculty and student opinions.

Positive expectations – The principal is finely tuned to negative attitudes among students and faculty and reverses them.

Strong, integrated curriculum – The principal works with the faculty to develop a long-term campus plan with specific expected outcomes.

Shared decision making – The principal maintains close contact with the site-based management teams to coordinate goals and objectives. Decision-making teams include department chairs or core teachers, counselors and at-risk coordinators.

Campus-wide responsibility for teaching and success – Within the context established by other critical elements, successful schools initiate emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics across the curriculum.

– Adapted from *Project Pathways: Programs That Work* (San Antonio, Texas: IDRA, 1993).

Resources

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demographic factors working against them, you do not say, "These kids cannot do it so I am going to dumb down the curriculum." You consciously have to say, "There is a challenge here, and I have got a lot of work to do. I am going to make sure I give you guys more because you are already behind." You have to give these students a variety of experiences, stimulation, inspiration and motivation instead of saying, "I know these kids cannot do it, I will just sit here and shoot the curriculum to them and if they make it, fine, if they do not, well what can you expect from this kind of kid." This "sitting back with low expectations" is a common syndrome in schools like Mary Hull, but it is not what we are doing here now.

Another way to create high expectations is to **add excitement** to what they are doing. If you think this is just a job and you clock-in at 7:30 and leave at 4:00, you are not going to get much out of it. And other people and students are going to pick up on that signal. But if the school is vibrant, exciting, and there is always a spirit of renewal and contemplation, then you are going to get a lot of positive things out of it.

I have a third grade section right now that is very low in terms of achievement. The students are having trouble with their math and reading. We have marshaled as many resources as we can to that grade level to assist those teachers and reduce the teacher/pupil ratio. Once you do that, you have won it all. But when you fail to provide any assistance and simply keep the ratios at the same levels, then you end up with a teacher who is very frustrated and a class that is not productive. So we have worked very hard to develop a team feeling. When you do that, the expectation level goes up.

Principal Roberto Zarate shows the National Blue Ribbon School award given to Mary Hull Elementary.

C.G.: How do you address the quality of teaching?

R.Z.: We **allow the teachers to make decisions** about what we are going to teach. Once they become committed to it, then the quality is there. We also value teamwork. Teachers work with each other to develop better units and to continue evolving. An evaluation system comprises one component of the **teamwork system,** but a larger issue is staff development – trusting each other and believing in creativity. A lot of people do not believe in creativity. They think it is just a flash in the pan. It is not. It is vital to achieving the results we are having. You will see all kinds of creativity on our campus.

C.G.: How have you brought resources to bear?

R.Z.: Well, you do not need a lot of resources. I understand that computers and software will cost money, and we have put those resources in good places. But the teachers are the key, not resources. If their attitudes are, "I am going to do the best I can, I am going to be creative, I am going to be caring, and I am going to have high expectations," then you do not need a lot of resources. A lot of times it is the teacher's enthusiasm and ability to carry the day that is vital. I am more concerned about what we do with what we have and how we maximize that.

Another key factor in maximizing resources is **staying focused and maintaining specific goals.** If someone comes in with a request that is not based on our goals, we are not going to consider it very seriously. I do not provide sole approval either. For example, one of my teachers brought a proposal to buy some new reading material to our school advisory team which is comprised of parents, myself, teachers and community members. The teacher developed and presented a rationale for the proposal, the advisory team approved the proposal, and now we are looking for ways to raise the needed money. It is that kind of involvement and reciprocity that is important here.

C.G.: You mentioned the school advisory team. Tell me about that.

R.Z.: The state requires all schools to set up a school advisory team, and the team has turned out to be a viable tool at our campus. I serve as the chairman of the team, along with elected teachers to represent all disciplines, four parents and two community members. The **advisory team sets the organizational tone** for the school. We

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EDUCATIONAL WEB SITES

IDRA Desegregation Assistance Center – South Central Collaborative
www.idra.org/dac-scc
Developing Educational Standards
putwest.boces.org/standards.html
ERIC and AskEric ericir.syr.edu
Fedworld www.fedworld.gov
Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) www.idra.org
National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE) www.ncbe.gwu.edu
Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA)
www.ed.gov/offices/OBEMLA
Office for Civil Rights www.ed.gov/offices/OCR
Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN) www.scoe.otan.dni.us/
Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education (SITE)
aace.virginia.edu/aace
STAR Center *(Support for Texas Academic Renewal) www.starcenter.org
Texas Education Network (TENET) www.tenet.edu/
Texas Education Agency www.tea.state.tx.us/
U.S. Department of Education www.ed.gov/
UCLA Center for Study of Evaluation gopher://spinoza.cse.ucla.edu:70/11/.CSE
Urban Education Web eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/
Webtour for Educators www.iearn.org/iearn/webtour/

– Compiled by Dr. Chris Green, IDRA.

**A collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corp.*

Principal Roberto Zarate works with Mary Hull Elementary students on their reading.

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discuss budgets, set priorities, establish goals and determine activities. There have been other suggestions that we have brought to them, and they have said no because they did not fit our goals. The advisory team at Mary Hull is a decision-making group that remains very strong and viable.

C.G.: Are there other examples of shared decision making?

R.Z.: We have day-long **collaboration meetings.** In these meetings, for instance, we will discuss that a certain student is having a problem in the classroom. Every teacher who affects that student sits down to discuss the student's problem. So instead of each classroom teacher having to deal with it by themselves, they receive input from each other. Before you know it, a plan of action is determined and there is a lot of communication between the staff in terms of that particular child. During our collaboration meetings, we review a whole list of children to see how they are doing.

We also have **team leaders** who come together from each grade level and meet with me about everyday operational decisions and concerns. Each team leader has autonomy with his or her own team. For example, the first grade team leader meets with the first grade team and they make decisions about their schedule, trips, curricula and anything else that is happening. I do not get involved in the process other than to listen and make sure the decisions are within our goal structure.

I allot each grade-level team a set amount of money to spend in any manner they decide – which is unusual because in most cases the principal maintains control over such decisions. I do not believe in that. To me, **teacher empowerment** is critical, especially in an environment like this. If I am in a school where the population is mostly upper- or middle-class families, the students come equipped with a lot of learning, and you do not have to work as hard. Teachers here at Mary Hull have to cover more ground within each year. So in order for teachers to feel that they have got the power to make that type of change, you have got to give them that power. We are going to have a retreat next month, and they will formulate our approach for next year. But that will come from the teachers, it will not come from me.

C.G.: Tell me more about how you are involving families and parents.

R.Z.: It is real tough to involve families at this level because the parents are working. Some of my parents are working two jobs, so you do not see the "little ladies" running around with aprons making things for teachers or doing things for the principal and his office staff. Every once in a while we will get a mother who can dedicate that kind of time. On special days here when we have a certain activity planned, you will see a lot of parents helping out teachers and working in classrooms for brief periods of time, the time that they can give us. We have had special things like **Family Math nights** and **Family Literacy nights**, where there are standing room only crowds. We have also had the *dies y seis de septiembre* and *cinco de mayo* **celebrations**, where every parent who we have asked to come up here has come and dedicated a lot of time.

The thing we ask of them that is more important is to take part in their child's daily homework and what is happening at school. We send home things like what our "right choice objective" of the week is, which is our discipline program. **Parents also get folders every day** discussing student progress, homework or related issues, and we ask the parents to sit down and review the material with their child. We want them to know what is happening with their child at school.

We also have tried to help our parents become more literate. We have the Even Start program on campus, and through that the parents can come up here and take **GED [General Education Diploma], ESL [English as a second language] or computer classes** during the week. Then we have the **Fast Family Program,** an eight-week program that helps to build stronger family networks that tie into the school. We have had more than 60 families complete the program. When you multiply that by at least two children per family, we have affected more than 120 kids and a lot of aunts, uncles and grandparents. It has really made a difference here in the tone of the school.

In terms of the GED program, for example, one of our moms just graduated, and she is already attending nursing school. We have another mom who earned her GED and is going to beauty college. She plans to start her own business. So we are starting to get some success stories out of the program. The most exciting thing to see is when they come in for the computer classes. Those classes are not about how to use a computer, they are literacy classes. They have to do with reading and writing and keyboarding, so the parents are becoming more literate.

The kids see their parents up here at school all the time *learning* – not volunteering – but learning. And so it clicks for them, and they say, "Well, hey, if Momma wants to learn, I am going to learn." The kids settle down and get serious about learning, and then they achieve positive results.

C.G.: What are some other ways that you have changed the curriculum?

R.Z.: We did a **math alignment**. We talked to each other to see what each grade level was doing in math. For instance, the first grade would talk to kindergarten and then turn around and talk to the second grade, and the second grade would talk to the third grade, and so on and so forth. We found out that we had gaps and had made assumptions about what we were teaching. We were teaching some things too much and some things not enough. So we aligned our curriculum and got a staff development program to go along with that.

In reading, we realized that, based on

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disaggregating our test data, we had some problems (everybody does) with main ideas and sequencing. As a result, we worked on units with those topics.

We also found out that comprehension was our main problem. So we took all the comprehension skills and **identified teaching strategies** that would promote the learning of that particular skill. For instance, we are using KWL (a process where kids take what they *know*, what they *want* to know and what they *learned*), with kindergarten through fifth grade students. If you are going to use KWL for comprehension, then you need to use it in all grade levels.

We also have a process called SQ3R that involves taking a reading sample apart and analyzing it for comprehension. Everybody in our school from second grade to fifth grade knows that method. They know exactly what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. It is a thinking process that they can apply not only now but later. One of our teachers is trying to become a bilingual teacher and had to take her exit exam the other day. She said, "I used the SQ3R, and it works!" So, it is having other benefits.

The strategies are valid and they are lifelong. If we can get those strategies built into our students' minds, they are going to be thinkers, and they are not going to be just sitting there waiting to have content dumped on them at the secondary level. They will be able to take the content, organize it, take it apart and find whatever the teacher wants them to find.

So we have aligned the curriculum, developed consistency in application, and introduced strategies that the kids can use, not only for testing, but for thinking. That, again, has been very successful for us.

C.G.: What would you say to schools that are trying to think of ways to become high performing, particularly high poverty schools?

R.Z.: Get excited about what you are doing. And **let the teachers take the lead.** I do not know of any school that will move unless the teachers are working together, making decisions and feeling like they have ownership of whatever the conditions are. My role here is to be a giant cheerleader and to try to stay a little ahead of the teachers in terms of new methodology, etc., and to try to be astute in terms of when we are doing too much and when we are not doing enough. A lot of schools try to do too much sometimes. They just keep adding things instead of taking what they have, examining it and restructuring like we did. So, if the teachers can examine and restructure, and if the teachers can feel like it is their plan and not just the principal's plan, or the central office's plan, or the state's plan, then they are going to be more effective and committed to make it happen.

The other issue, too, is that we have got to **quit judging.** It is very easy for me to pick you apart as a human being, while I am sitting here with all of these faults of my own. We cannot do that. All judging does is destroy whatever positive element there is

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HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT IDRA ACTIVITIES

In April, IDRA worked with **7,248** teachers, administrators and parents through **123** training and technical assistance activities and **109** program sites in **12** states plus the United Kingdom. Topics included:

- Fourth Annual IDRA *La Semana Del Niño* Early Childhood Education Educator's Institute
- Welcoming the Computer in the Classroom
- Implementing a Dual Language Program
- *Families United for Education* Conference for Parents by Parents

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- Truth or Consequences, New Mexico
- Harlandale Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- Texas Education Service Center Region XVII
- Pearsall ISD, Texas
- Arkansas Education Agency
- West Orange Cove ISD, Texas

Activity Snapshot

Through its *Community Leadership for Standards-Based Reform* project, IDRA is creating a national model for involving parents and communities in the development of academic standards. Participating schools, community organizations and IDRA are forming a partnership to create a concerted effort that will result in the design, initiation and evaluation of successful family involvement strategies. IDRA's role in this initiative, funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, involves school-community planning sessions on conducting outreach to families bilingually, leadership training for community organizations, focus groups in which parents interview other parents, and a community forum for parents designed by parents. The project will fill a national gap through the development of bilingual, non-jargon-filled materials to explain academic standards to parents.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- public school teachers
- parents
- administrators
- other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- training and technical assistance
- evaluation
- serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula.

For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210/684-8180.

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on the campus. So instead of wondering why your teammate is doing something, you have got to look at what she is producing. If her result is positive, then that is her style, and you have got to let that happen. And we have to quit judging the parents. Their condition has nothing to do with your ability to teach those kids. Also, when those kids come to school, their condition has nothing to do with what you are going to teach them. You have got to quit judging and just do your job, do it to the best of your ability, be creative and quit suffering. A lot of teachers working in schools like ours "suffer" a lot. They say things like, "Oh I wish I could teach kids that can learn to read, and if I wanted to talk about Shakespeare they would not go, 'Huh?'" If your students do not know about Shakespeare, expose them to it.

We have a benefactor who offered to take us to see the musical *My Fair Lady*. As soon as I mentioned the offer, some of the staff said, "There is no way. These kids are not used to this, it is just not going to happen." But my staff rented the video, showed the video, discussed the story line and listened to the music enough so that by the time the kids got to the theater, they were eager to see the show because they had it memorized. The children sat for three hours, all of them – third, fourth and fifth graders – three hours without moving or begging to go to the bathroom. They sat through a beautiful presentation at the Josephine Theater, and now the kids are begging the teachers to play the soundtrack while they do their work in class. So you walk down the hall, and you hear CD playing "I Could've Danced All Night." But if my staff had insisted, "No, they cannot do that, we do not want to do that because we are worried about the way they are going to behave" (judging, judging, judging), we would not have had that beautiful experience.

I think that is the thing that schools need to do – quit being judgmental, **get proactive** and enjoy what you have. These little guys are fun to play with. They may not have some of the advantages that other people have, but they have their own experiences that are just as valid. And they *can* learn.

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